

Ada Writing Style Guide

Introduction

The **Ada Writing Style Guide** sets out principles that help make your written material accessible to a wide range of readers. Good writing is accessible writing. The modern business writing style is a professional way of communicating that prioritises clarity, conciseness, and accuracy. This guide will help you convey information effectively in a formal setting. The core principles are:

- **Clear:** The reader readily understands the key message. Business documents are well-organised, using headings, bullet points, and white space to improve clarity and readability.
- **Concise:** Get straight to the point and avoid unnecessary words or fluff. Sentences are typically short and simple, with few clauses.
- **Accurate:** Ensure the information is reliable and verifiable.
- **Professional:** Maintain a formal tone and avoid slang or informal (casual) language.

The style draws on guidance from multiple sources, including the Open University and the British Dyslexia Association (British Dyslexia Association 2023, Open University 2024). Have a look at the style guide [example document](#) to see what this looks like in practice.

Ada Google Workspace and document requirements.

Ada uses [Google Workspace](#) for document creation, storage, sharing, and marking. Unless stated otherwise, all assignments and portfolio statements **must** be written and submitted using Google Docs or other Workspace apps (such as Google Slides or Sheets). Submitting Microsoft Word documents to a Google Classroom is **not** permitted. Marking, commenting and versioning is only properly supported on Google Docs and other Google Workspace document formats. Course leaders will provide a report [submission template](#) for assignments.

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1. Readability

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Fonts

- **12 point (pt) font size** for the main body text.
- Use **sans-serif fonts**, such as [Calibri](#), [Verdana](#), and [Arial](#). Serifs are the decorative ticks on the ends of letters ([Figure 1](#)). Fonts *without* serifs (sans-serif) appear less ‘crowded’ to people with dyslexia, and are easier to discern where English is not the first language. They are also easier to read on screen.
- **Code snippets, variable names and file names** can be differentiated from narrative text by using monospaced (typewriter-style) fonts such as [Courier](#).
 - For example, “The file `hello.py` contained the code `print(‘Hello, World!’)`

Figure 1: Serif vs. Sans-serif fonts

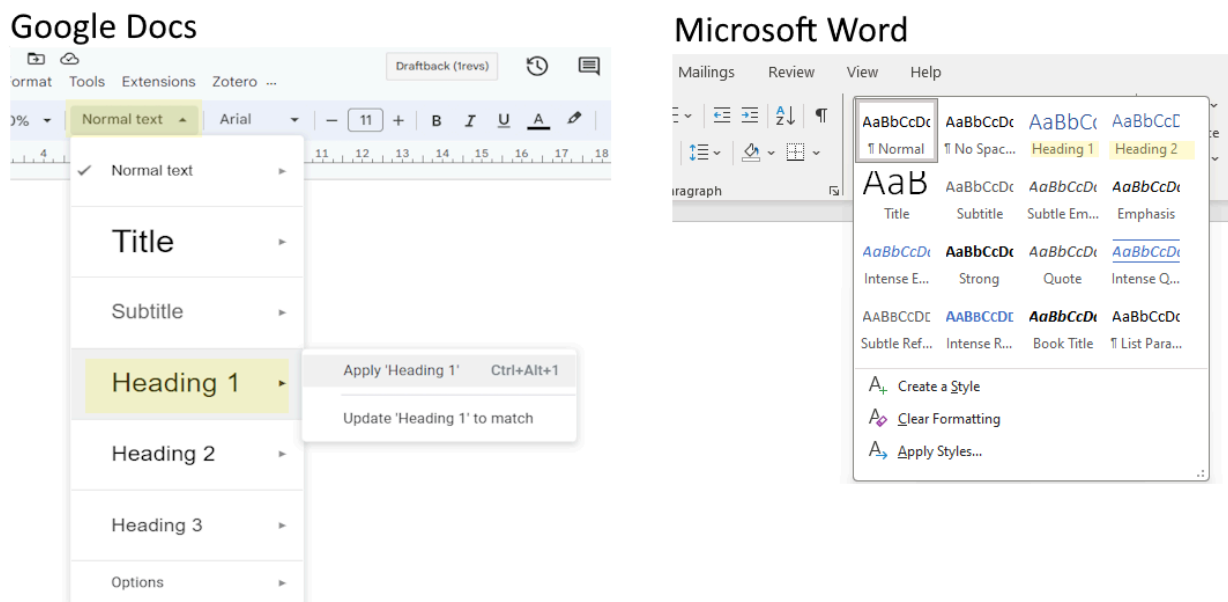


Formatting

- **Be consistent** in your document formatting style. Use [Headings & Subheading styles](#) in your word processor app to apply formatting consistently ([Figure 2](#)).
- **Define document styles:** You can define your own style sheet for your document. For example, you can set the “normal” text style to always be Calibri 12 pt, single-spaced.
- **Page Margins:** Set all page margins (left/right/top/bottom) to **20 mm (2 cm)**. This is sufficient for page numbering and a single page-header line. Page margin width is related to readability, with a target of 12 to 15 words per line at a given font size (12pt).
- **Line spacing:** Use single spacing (1x or 1.15x) for body text. Double-spacing is only useful for manually commenting on printed documents. People with dyslexia may also prefer wider line spacing ([Figure 3](#))
- **Bulleted Lists spacing:** Add a half-line gap (6 pt) below each item in a numbered or bulleted list. This helps make the list more readable.
- **Add empty line space after every paragraph.** This is best done using automatic paragraph formatting in your word processor ([Figure 3](#))

- **Left Alignment:** Left-aligned text is considered easiest to read, especially for lists. Justified text (aligned left and right margins) can look professional, but uneven spacing between words can make it more difficult to read. Avoid centred or right-aligned text.
- **Do not indent paragraphs.** This fell out of fashion with the typewriter! It is superseded by using empty line space after paragraphs.
- **Emphasis Text:** Use **bold** for emphasis. Avoid underlining and *italics*, as this makes reading more challenging for people with dyslexia (BDA 2023)
- **Copy-Paste without formatting (CTRL-SHIFT-V).** When copying text from other online documents, you may inadvertently import the document formatting and font styles as well. This will make your own document formatting inconsistent, Save time by pasting without any formatting from the source document, rather than correct it afterwards.

Figure 2: Using Styles in Word Processors for formatting consistency and sign-posting



Spelling & Grammar

- **Always use a spelling and grammar checker** on your work to ensure flawless grammar, punctuation, and spelling before submitting. Always check the suggestions to ensure they make sense. Use free grammar checker extensions for web browsers to check text in Google Docs and Gmail. e.g. [LanguageTool](#) (Figure 4) or [Grammarly](#). Generative AI tools (ChatGPT, Google Gemini, Microsoft Co-pilot) to review grammar and give feedback on the style and readability of written reports.
- Use **British English** spelling rules (e.g. 'centre', not 'center'; 'analyse' not 'analyze').
- **Use Capitals for proper nouns:** The names of software companies or applications are proper nouns e.g. **Google**, **Excel**, **Python**, **Microsoft**, **Amazon** etc.
 - **Initialisations** are usually in all-capitals e.g. **HTML**, **SQL**, **CSS**, **API**.

- Be aware of names with capitals in the middle. For example, **YouTube**, **JavaScript**, **PostgreSQL**, **eBay**.
- **Spaces after punctuation:** Add **one space** after commas, and after full stops. This makes it easy to read sentences with clauses. Using two spaces after a full stop is also acceptable (if less common nowadays).

Figure 3: Line Spacing & Paragraph formatting

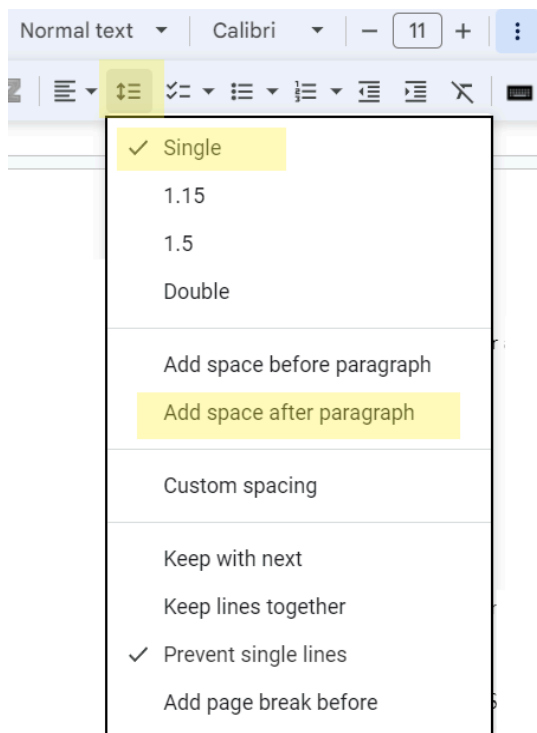
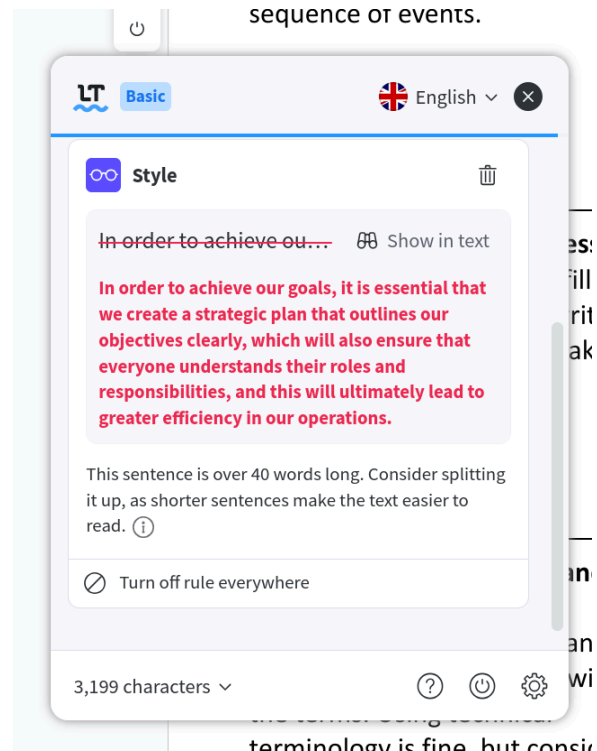


Figure 4: LanguageTool Chrome Extension



2. Business Writing Style

Business writing should be clear, concise, and accessible. It is probably not the style you learned in English lessons in school. It's not suitable for creative writing, or love letters. This section identifies key elements of the style that are widely accepted in modern Business English. The overall aim is to try to write in simple, clear language using everyday words. This also makes your writing accessible to a wider audience (The Write Life, 2018; Shine, 2023). [Table 1](#) gives practical examples of writing for clarity. See also [Table 4](#) for guides to academic report writing.

Tips for Clear & Concise Writing

- **Short sentences:** Avoid unwieldy sentences with too many clauses ("...and...but... then...also..."). Sentences should make one point and be under 30 words (two lines).
- **Formal tone:** Maintain a professional and objective tone throughout the report. Avoid slang.

- **Maintain consistency:** Use consistent margins, spacing, and indentation throughout the report.
- **Break text into short, focused paragraphs.** Avoid large blocks of text, covering multiple main points or themes in one go. A paragraph should introduce and explore a single 'idea'.
 - Look for logical breaks to start new paragraphs. For example, if you are describing three key steps in a task, give each step its own paragraph.
 - Aim for five to seven sentences per paragraph.
- **Avoid unnecessary jargon.** While using industry-standard technical terminology in your writing is recommended, avoid unnecessary 'business speak' or buzzwords.
- **Spell out initialisations when first used.** Use industry standard terminology in your writing. Explain any business-specific terms. Add a glossary of terms if needed.
- **Use images to support your narrative.** A picture is worth a thousand words, and can provide more compelling and concise information than text alone. Ensure images and charts are easy to understand.
 - **Flow charts** are ideal for explaining complex procedures, processes, or algorithms.
 - [Gantt charts](#) are great for showing project timelines and sequencing.
 - **Tightly-cropped screenshots** can highlight key features in code, presentations, or user interface designs. Annotate screenshots with arrows and text boxes to illustrate key features. Screenshots of feedback emails from managers or customers can provide evidence of success.
- **Bullet points and tables:** Use bullet points, tables, and graphs to present complex information clearly. When listing themes or topics you plan to discuss, use a bulleted or numbered list (if the list is in a specific order). Next, give each point its own paragraph or two. Begin bulleted lists of actions with action (verb) words, e.g. "**1. Discuss** aims with client team **2. Design** new frontend on Figma"
- **Write out numbers under 10:** In scientific and technical writing, the style is to write out numbers under 10, and numbers at the start of sentences. Do not write out years, ages or financial sums. For example, "I developed **five** new proposals for **two** clients within the **12-week** deadline"

Checking your work for clarity

- **Use Text-to-Speech to listen to your writing style:** Hearing your text being read aloud helps you to appreciate how it will come across to a new reader. Use AI-assisted Text-to-Speech extensions such as [Speechify](#) to listen to your writing ([Table 5](#)). Alternatively, ask a trusted human to read your work instead!
- **Use Generative AI tools to rewrite passages to improve clarity.** Do not ask AI tools to write the report for you! Avoid copying sensitive personal or corporate data onto web-based tools.

- **Online Accessibility:** For website apps and online forms, refer to accessibility guidance such as the **Web Accessibility Content Guidelines (WCAG)** (World Wide Web Consortium, 2024) ([Table 10](#))

Table 1: Guide to writing for clarity

Things to watch for	Example	Suggested Improvement
Use the Active Voice. Putting the actor before the verb improves clarity.	The report was finished by Ismael	Ismael finished the report.
Avoid Excessive Adverbs Use strong verbs instead. You should also avoid adding unnecessary adjectives.	The code ran much more quickly than before. That was a really very helpful improvement for the overall user experience.	The code was faster than before. That improved the user experience.
Keep sentences short. Short sentences are digestible. They capture attention and maintain rhythm. Avoid nested (subordinate) clauses. Aim for under 30 words per sentence, and only one clause. Streamline the sentence by reducing subordination and clarifying the sequence of events.	The team, which had been working tirelessly for months, and despite facing numerous challenges along the way, finally managed to complete the project on time, which was a relief to everyone involved. In order to achieve our goals, it is essential that we create a strategic plan that outlines our objectives clearly, which will also ensure that everyone understands their roles and responsibilities, and this will ultimately lead to greater efficiency in our operations.	Despite many challenges, the team completed the project on time. After months of tireless work, this was a relief to everyone involved. To achieve our goals, we need a clear strategic plan that outlines objectives, and clarifies roles and responsibilities. This will improve operational efficiency.
Avoid unnecessary wordiness We often use unnecessary filler words and phrases in our writing. Cut out the padding, just make your point.	Due to the fact that the software was not updated, the system experienced several frequent failures. It could be said that the application had redundant features. I made a total of three different proposals.	Because the software was not updated, the system experienced many failures. The application had redundant features. I made three proposals.

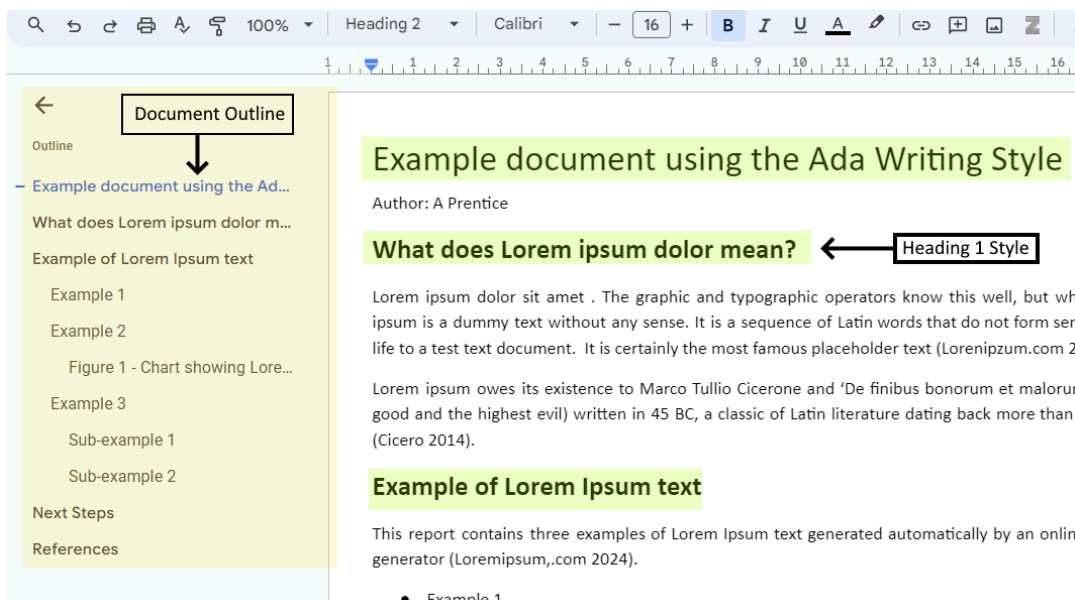
Things to watch for	Example	Suggested Improvement
Avoid unnecessary jargon and buzzwords. Using unnecessary jargon can confuse readers unfamiliar with the terms. Using technical terminology is expected for an ICT professional, but consider adding a glossary for unfamiliar terms or initialisations.	By implementing a holistic, omnichannel strategy and fostering a culture of innovation, I was able to seamlessly integrate cross-functional teams to deliver best-in-class, scalable solutions.	By using a comprehensive approach and encouraging innovation, I brought together diverse teams to create high-quality solutions.
	The synergistic effects of the collaborative paradigm shift were analysed.	We analysed the effects of working together in a new way.
Avoid overloading Noun Phrases The sentence is overloaded with noun phrases, making it complex and difficult to follow. Break the noun phrases into simple actions. This makes the sentence easier to understand.	The committee's decision on the matter of the allocation of resources for the new project was met with approval by everyone.	The committee decided to allocate resources for the new project, and everyone approved.
	I supported the people who use computers while at the office	I supported office computer users.
Avoid Vague Language Vague quantifiers ('a few', 'Some', 'soon') do not provide clarity.	The project will be completed soon. We have allocated a few people to work on it full-time.	The project will be completed by the end of the week. We allocated five full-time coders.
Avoid Ambiguity Make sure it is clear who the actors are. Check that the context is unambiguous across sentences or paragraphs.	They reviewed the report for them before passing it to the team.	The manager reviewed the draft report with the client, before passing it to the marketing team.
Spell out initials the first time they are used. While some initials and abbreviations are industry standards (e.g. HTML, CSS, SQL), others are workplace or sector specific. If you use a lot of jargon, create a glossary in your report.	The SPM required SMT clearance before being passed to CQT.	The Software Permission Manager project (SPM) required Senior Management Team (SMT) clearance before being passed to the Code Quality Team (CQT)

3. Structure and Signposting

Signposting in long documents improves readability, engagement, organisation, and comprehension. Breaking down documents into manageable, logical sections improves navigation and helps the reader to quickly locate the information they are looking for. Signposting keeps readers engaged, and helps identify key arguments.

- **Use Headings & Sub-heading styles:** You can define heading styles in your word processor ([Figure 2](#)). For clarity, use the same sans-serif font used in the main text. Bold formatting can be applied to the style. Headings should use scaled font sizes, down to 12 pt for normal text.
 - **Descriptive headings:** Use descriptive headings and subheadings that accurately reflect the content of the section.
 - **Logical flow:** Ensure a logical flow between headings and subheadings, guiding the reader progressively through the report's arguments.
- **Document Map for navigation:** Google Docs and MS Word can display an outline document map based on headings and subheadings in your document ([Figure 4](#)). This can make navigating long documents much easier for authors and readers.
- **Tables of Contents:** Word processors can create a table of contents (with page numbers) using document headings.

Figure 4: Document outline showing headings and subheadings used in document



Executive Summaries and Conclusions

- An **Executive summary** (or 'Abstract') is more than an introduction. It should be a concise overview of the entire document aimed at people with limited time or attention span. The summary outlines the aims and objectives of the report, describes actions taken,

summaries key findings and any proposed next steps. All in under **150** words. It is the last thing you write, not the first.

- **Report conclusions** should look forward, not back. They are **not** a summary of the report (that's what the Executive Summary is for). A useful conclusion could suggest next steps, or discuss how lessons learned might affect future actions.
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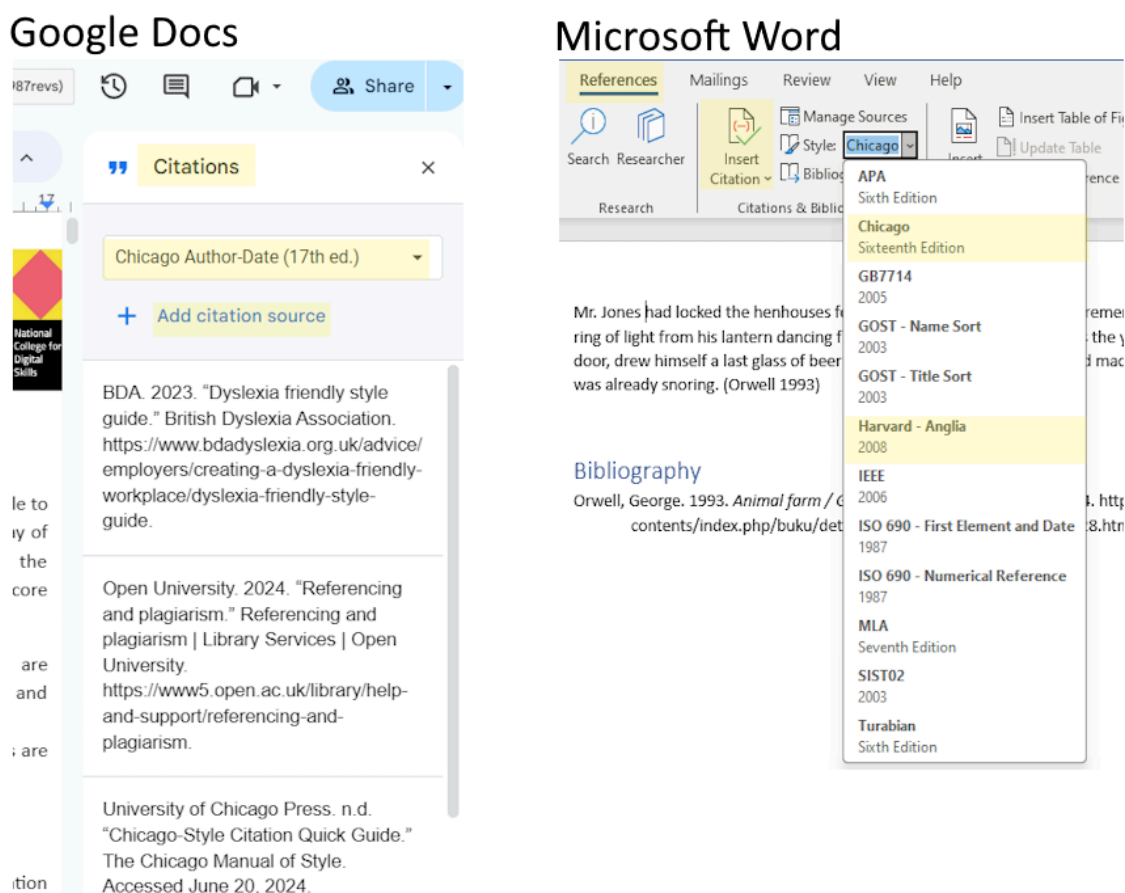
4. Referencing

Citing your sources in a document make your writing more credible, trust-worthy and authoritative. It helps you avoid accusations of plagiarism by giving credit to original authors. Adding a bibliography, or list of references, to your document allows readers to locate and follow-up your sources (see [Table 6](#) for guides to referencing). You can use the citation tools in Google Docs or MS Word to manage your referencing for you ([Figure 5](#)).

Citing your sources

- **Use Author-Date style for citations:** The Author-Date citation style is a method of citing sources in which the author's last name and the year of publication are included in the text of the document, in parentheses. Use a citation tool or extension to manage referencing for you ([Table 7](#)).
 - **Author-Date:** Include the author's last name and the year of publication in parentheses.
e.g. "When checking my work, I referred to the Ada style guide (Ada, 2024)".
 - **Use a consistent style:** "[Open University Cite-it-Right](#)", "[Chicago](#)" and "[Harvard](#)" are examples of author-date citation styles.
- **Reference List & Bibliography:** Include a **reference list** of all cited sources at the end of your document. Use a citation tool to generate the list automatically, in the right format. A **Bibliography** includes sources you have referred to in the body of your text as well as sources that were part of your background reading but were not referenced in the assignment or report.

Figure 5: Adding Citations and Reference list / Bibliography in Google Docs and MS Word



Referencing tables and images

- **In-text reference:** When referring to a table or figure in the text, mention its number within parentheses, for example, "(Table 2)" or "(Figure 1)".
- **Number consecutively:** Assign unique numbers to all tables and figures (charts, graphs, images) sequentially as they appear in the report text.
- **Use meaningful titles for all graphics/tables:** The title should describe what the figure shows and, if relevant, the source of the data. You can use bookmarks in Google Docs/Word to create links to the figure and tables in your text.
- **Titles above figures:** This is best-practice for documents that are most likely to be read online, with pages scrolling vertically.
- **Using an appendix:** If the table or figure is non-critical, or if their frequency risks disrupting the readability (flow) of your text, then you can include them in an appendix at the end of the report text.

Researching academic reports

Make sure to use reliable evidence in your research reports. For academic assignments, consider using open-source journal articles. These are quality-controlled and peer-reviewed by subject

experts ([Table 8](#)). For longer research reports or dissertation, review general guidance on research methods and writing research reports ([Table 9](#)).

END

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Appendix: Supporting Tables

Table 3: Quick summary of Ada Style Guide

Font	12 point font size. Sans-serif font (Calibri, Arial, Verdana)	Format	Single Spaced, Left-aligned. Blank line between paragraphs. Half-height line between list items (6 point). Single space after punctuation.
DO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check spelling & grammar before submission • Clear, crisp writing. No waffle. No filler. • Use signposting (headings, subheadings, summary lists), to make your narrative easy to follow • Use tables and images to help keep your writing concise. • Use a referencing tool to cite your sources consistently 	AVOID	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long, complex sentences. • Excessive wordiness. • Inconsistent formatting. • Figures or tables without meaningful titles

Table 4: Guide to Writing reports in academic English

Resource Name / Link	Description
<u>Academic Writing Style (OU)</u>	Guidance from the Open University on the academic writing style. Read this. Free registration using your Ada account.
<u>Academic English: Writing Specialization (UCL, Irvine)</u>	A comprehensive series aimed at improving academic writing skills. Hosted on Coursera,
<u>Writing in English at University</u>	Focuses on academic writing skills for university students, including structuring texts and using sources effectively. (Lund University)
<u>Academic Phrase bank - University of Manchester</u>	The Academic Phrase bank is a general resource for academic writers. It provides examples of common phraseological ‘nuts and bolts’, organised according to the main sections of a research paper or dissertation
<u>Technical report writing - University of Sussex</u>	This guide explains the commonly accepted format for a degree-level technical report; explains the purposes of the individual sections; and gives hints on how to go about drafting and refining a report to produce an accurate, professional document.

Table 5: Tools to help improve writing clarity

Resource Name / Link	Description
Speechify	Text-to-speech browser extension for listening to how your writing sounds to other people. Register using Ada Google account. Useful for reading long articles online.
LanguageTool	AI Grammar and spelling tool for web browsers. Words with Google Workspace. Register using Ada Google account. The Browser add-on does not store text off-site.
Generative AI Tools ChatGPT / Google Gemini	You can ask online AI tools to suggest improvements to your writing or to summarise lengthy text. Be careful about uploading any sensitive material to these tools. Always carefully review and edit AI-generated text. Google Gemini adds a “proofread” tool to Google Docs.

Table 6: Guides to Referencing and Plagiarism

Resource Name / Link	Description
Referencing Guide from the Open University	A guide on referencing and avoiding plagiarism provided by the Open University Library Services.
OU Referencing - CTR	Guide to OU “Cite them Right” (CTR) referencing. Typical Author-Date referencing style. Very similar to Chicago style.
The Chicago Manual of Style Online	The Chicago “Author-Date” referencing system is one of the most commonly used in academic and business writing. It is very similar to the OU CTR ‘Harvard’ style.

Table 7: Citation and Referencing Software


Resource Name / Link	Description
Google Docs	Built-in citation tool in Google Docs (Tools — Citation). For an Author-Date citation style, use “Chicago Author Date”.
Microsoft Word	Built-in citation tool (under ‘References’). For an Author-Date citation style, use “Chicago” or “Harvard - Anglia”.
Zotero 	A free tool to help collect, organise, cite, and share research citations. Includes support for Google Docs and MS Word. Useful for building citation libraries for use in multiple reports.

Table 8: Open Access Journal Articles & Academic Resources






Resource Name / Link	Description
IEEE Xplore 	<p>Ada Apprentices have free access to IEEE Xplore for full-text journal articles. Lots of additional features for automatic searching for topics. Set up a personal account to create and save search alerts for papers matching stored searches.</p>
Google Scholar 	<p>Google Scholar is a good place to start when looking for an article. It automatically provides links to many Open Access articles, institutional and subject repositories, preprint servers and academic social networks, as you can see in the example on this page.</p>
CORE 	<p>The world's largest aggregator of open access research papers. It allows users to search over 220 million open access (OA) articles Core Discovery Browser Extension</p>
Unpaywall 	<p>UnPaywall harvests Open Access content from over 50,000 publishers and repositories, and makes it easy to find, track, and use. Install the Chrome Extension to get access to free versions of paywalled articles.</p>
ScienceOpen 	<p>Offers over 74 million open access articles in all areas of science. Although you do need to register to view the full text of articles, registration is free.</p>
dblp Computer Science Bibliography	<p>An index of major computer science publications, offering access to OA articles.</p>
Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ)	<p>Provides access to millions of high-quality, peer-reviewed open access journal articles.</p>
arXiv e-Print Archive	<p>Offers open access to over one million e-prints in various fields of science and engineering. The arXiv e-Print Archive is run by Cornell University Library</p>
Social Science Research Network	<p>A collection of papers from the social science community. Free registration.</p>
ResearchGate	<p>A commercial social networking site for scientists and researchers to share papers and collaborate.</p>

Table 9: Research Methodology

Resource Name / Link	Description
Understanding Research Methods	Coursera MOOC demystifies research methods and fundamentals, primarily aimed at postgraduates (University of London)
University of Reading - Free Research Resources	A compilation of free research resources across various disciplines provided by the University of Reading.

Table 10: Creating Accessible Digital & Online Content

Resource Name / Link	Description
WCAG2 Quick Reference Guide	<p>The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) guidance on creating accessible online content. There is a wealth of insight in the WCAG guidance for people designing online content. There are also many tools for online and offline accessibility testing of digital content.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• W3C Web Accessibility Fundamentals• W3C Accessibility Testing Tools

Table 11: Digital Skills for Higher Education

Resource Name / Link	Description
Digital Skills Awareness for Starting Higher Education	FutureLearn course on essential digital skills needed for higher education in the UK.

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